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Research Memorandum 75-7

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SOLDIERS' ATTRIBUTION OF CONTEMPORARY VS TRADITIONAL SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES TO THEMSELVES AND TO OTHERS

Joel M. Savell
U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences

and
Barry Collins
Contemporary Research, Inc.

SOCIAL PROCESSES TECHNICAL AREA

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U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences

and

Barry Collins
Contemporary Research, Inc.

Submitted by:
David R. Segal, Chief
Social Processes Technical Area

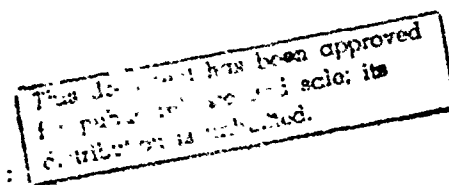
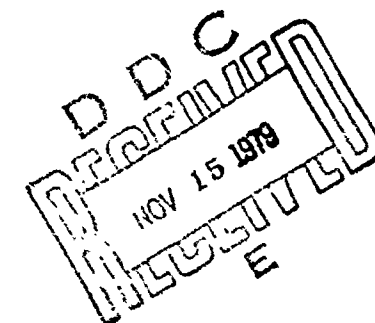
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Approved by:

E. Ralph Dusek, Director
Individual Training and Performance
Research Laboratory

J. E. Uhlaner, Technical Director
U.S. Army Research Institute for
the Behavioral and Social Sciences

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- A -

SOLDIERS' ATTRIBUTION OF CONTEMPORARY VS TRADITIONAL SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES TO THEMSELVES AND TO OTHERS

During 1974 the number of women in the Army increased by 53% to a total of 38,174.¹ During this period also the Army opened to women a number of Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) that previously had been closed to them.² By the end of 1974, therefore, more women (both proportionately and in absolute numbers) were occupying traditionally male jobs than at any time since the end of World War II.³ Given this increase in the number of women in traditionally male Army jobs, which is expected to continue, it is worth asking how Army personnel are likely to react to this development. Are soldiers likely to be so resistant to changes of this sort that the implementation of these changes will be made difficult? One way of getting at this question is to ask how soldiers feel about women remaining in more traditional roles--i.e., taking care of the house and children, and leaving the provision of financial support to the men. The data reported here provide some evidence on this question.

↓
The data ^{was} ~~was~~ collected as part of a larger research effort to develop an instrument that would measure attitudes toward women in the Army. In January 1974 an anonymous 174-item questionnaire was administered to a combined sample of approximately 800 soldiers (both officers and enlisted, both men and women) at Fort Dix, New Jersey; Fort Lewis, Washington and Madigan General Hospital at Fort Lewis; and Fort Meade, Maryland; and from the group, 721 usable questionnaires were obtained. Of this sample, 540 (75%) were men and 181 (25%) were women; 401 (56%) were officers and 320 (44%) were enlisted. In response to a question on this matter, approximately two-thirds of the women said they expected to leave the Army before they retired but only 48% of the men said this. The sample design had been constructed so as to include both white and non-white respondents and to include samples from installations that varied in type and were geographically dispersed. Nevertheless, until certain additional analyses have been carried out one should be cautious about generalizing the results to the rest of the Army. It should be noted also that the situation of women in the Army is changing rapidly, and the attitudes expressed on this topic at one time may or may not coincide with the attitudes expressed at some later date.

¹ Strength of the Army, DCSPER-46. Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army. December 1973 and December 1974.

² AR 611-201, 1 July 1974.

³ Utilization of Military Women, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower & Reserve Affairs), December 1972. Also, Enlisted Strength Inventory Report, COPO-45. US Military Personnel Center, Department of the Army. December 1973 and December 1974.

One part of the questionnaire asked the respondent to read two statements⁴ concerning the role of women in today's society:

1. Under ordinary circumstances, women belong in the home, caring for children and carrying out domestic duties; whereas men should be responsible for financial support of the family.

2. Relationships between men and women are ideally equal and husbands and wives should share domestic, childrearing, and financial responsibilities.

After reading these two statements the respondent was asked to say which statement he/she agreed with most and then say which of the statements he/she thought that each of six other persons or groups would agree with most. The instructions to the respondent are reproduced below:

	<u>Statement</u>	
1. Circle the number of the statement <u>you</u> agree with most	1	2
2. Circle the one you think <u>your mother</u> would agree with most	1	2
3. Circle the one you think <u>your father</u> would agree with most	1	2
4. Circle the one your <u>closest friend of the same sex</u> would agree with most	1	2
5. Circle the one your <u>closest friend of the opposite sex</u> would agree with most	1	2
6. Circle the one you think the majority of men in the Army would agree with	1	2
7. Circle the one you think the majority of women in the Army would agree with	1	2

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the data obtained in response to this set of items, we want to present some evidence regarding the validity of these items--i.e., the degree to which the respondents really held the views which, on this set of items, they said they held. One way of checking on this

⁴ These two statements summarize the ideas underlying the 6-item scale used by Jean Lipman-Blumen (How ideology shapes women's lives. Scientific American, January 1972).

is to see if the underlying attitude implied by the respondent's answer to these questions is consistent with the underlying attitude implied by his/her answer to other logically related questions. For example, if the respondents who chose the second (contemporary) statement for themselves (item #1) really are more contemporary in sex-role attitudes than those who chose the first (traditional) alternative, we would expect them more often than the self-identified traditionalists to take the strict egalitarian position on such other issues as subjecting women to the draft and permitting them to hold combat-related jobs. Table 1 shows the percentages of self-identified contemporaries and traditionalists who endorsed the strict egalitarian position on five such items from the questionnaire.

Table 1

PERCENTAGES OF SELF-IDENTIFIED "CONTEMPORARIES"
AND "TRADITIONALISTS" ENDORSING THE STRICT EGALITARIAN
POSITION ON EACH OF FIVE CRITICAL ISSUES

Issue	Percentage endorsing strict egalitarian position					
	OVERALL (N = 121) Contemp. Trad.		MEN (n = 54) Contemp. Trad.		WOMEN (n = 67) Contemp. Trad.	
If men are drafted into the Army, should women be drafted too? (Egalitarian position: "Yes")	66	47	71	48	55	27
Would women make good front-line combat soldiers if they were trained properly? (Egalitarian position: "Yes")	55	32	53	30	61	50
If women were assigned to combat units, would the Army become more effective, would it stay the same, or would it become less effective? (Egalitarian position: "More effective" or "stay the same")	54	28	49	27	65	43
Is the job "rifle-carrying infantry foot soldier" an appropriate job for women? (Egalitarian position: "Yes")	25	13	30	12	45	29

is to see if the underlying attitude implied by the respondent's answer to these questions is consistent with the underlying attitude implied by his/her answer to other logically related questions. For example, if the respondents who chose the second (contemporary) statement for themselves (item 01) really are more contemporary in sex-role attitudes than those who chose the first (traditional) alternative, we would expect them more often than the self-identified traditionalists to take the strict egalitarian position on such other issues as subjecting women to the draft and permitting them to hold combat-related jobs. Table 1 shows the percentages of self-identified contemporaries and traditionalists who endorsed the strict egalitarian position on five such items from the questionnaire.

Table 1

PERCENTAGES OF SELF-IDENTIFIED "CONTEMPORARIES"
AND "TRADITIONALISTS" ENDORSING THE STRICT EGALITARIAN
POSITION ON EACH OF FIVE CRITICAL ISSUES

Issue	Percentage endorsing strict egalitarian position					
	OVERALL (N = 122)		MEN (n = 50)		WOMEN (n = 121)	
	Contemp.	Trad.	Contemp.	Trad.	Contemp.	Trad.
If men are drafted into the Army, should women be drafted too? (Egalitarian position: "Yes")	66	47	71	48	55	27
Would women make good front-line combat soldiers if they were trained properly? (Egalitarian position: "Yes")	55	32	53	30	61	50
If women were assigned to combat units, would the Army become more effective, would it stay the same, or would it become less effective? (Egalitarian position: "More effective" or "stay the same")	54	28	49	27	65	43
Is the job "rifle-carrying infantry foot soldier" an appropriate job for women? (Egalitarian position: "Yes")	25	13	30	12	45	29

Thus--though some contemporaries failed to end up the strict egalitarian position on one or more of these issues--overall, and for men and women considered separately, these self-identified contemporaries took the contemporary or egalitarian position on these issues more often than did the self-identified traditionalists. The evidence is strong, therefore, that the two groups really are different and that, on the whole, one of them really is more contemporary in sex-role attitudes than the other.

Table 2 shows the percentages of respondents who attributed the contemporary position to each of the seven individuals and groups. The table shows, first, the overall percentages and, then, the separate percentages for male and female officers and for male and female enlisted.

Table 2
PERCENTAGES ATTRIBUTING CONTEMPORARY
(RATHER THAN TRADITIONAL)
SEX-ROLE ATTITUDE TO SPECIFIED INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

Item #	Individual or Group Referent	Overall (N = 721)	Officers		Enlisted	
			Men (n = 290)	Women (n = 111)	Men (n = 250)	Women (n = 70)
6	Majority of women in the Army	85	81	87	86	80
1	Self	73	66	94	66	89
5	Closest friend of the opposite sex	70	72	69	70	54
4	Closest friend of the same sex	63	57	89	54	73
2	Mother	46	43	53	44	56
3	Father	34	30	42	32	39
7	Majority of men in the Army	29	26	21	38	23

The pattern shown by these percentages suggests the following observations:

1. The group most often (85%) seen as contemporary on this issue was the group referred to as the "majority of women in the Army." In fact, there was more consensus about the contemporariness of this group than there was about the contemporariness of any of the other groups we asked about.

2. The group least often (29%) seen as contemporary on this issue was the group referred to as the "majority of men in the Army." Whatever the facts of the case, Army men seem to have a reputation for being traditional on this issue.

3. Women less frequently described the "majority of men in the Army" as contemporary than men did (21% vs. 31%). This is the case for both officers and enlisted; it suggests that, in making these judgments, the men and the women in our sample were applying different criteria. This finding, that women were less likely than men to say that male soldiers are contemporary in sex-role attitudes, is consistent with findings from previous research with civilian samples.⁵

4. In each of the categories examined, women were more frequently seen as contemporary on this issue than men were, a finding consistent with previous research on this question.⁶ For example:

The majority of women in the Army were seen as contemporary by 55% of the respondents, but the majority of men in the Army were seen as contemporary by only 29%.

The respondent's mother was seen as contemporary in 46% of the cases, but the respondent's father was seen as contemporary by only 34%.

When the closest friend was a woman (i.e., the same-sex friend of female respondents or the opposite-sex friend of male respondents) approximately 74% saw her as contemporary; but when this person was a man (i.e., the same-sex friend of male respondents or the opposite-sex friend of female respondents) only 58% saw him as contemporary.

5. In self-descriptions, women more often described themselves as contemporary on this issue than men did (90% vs. 66%), a finding consistent with what has been reported in most previous research.⁷ In the case of women, the way the respondents described themselves was similar to the way they were described by others. In the case of men, on the other hand, the way

⁵ Kaplan, R. M., and Goldman, R. D. The stereotypes of college students toward the average man's and woman's attitudes toward women. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1973, 20, 459-462.

⁶ Kaplan and Goldman, 1973, op. cit.

⁷ That is, in most previous studies women have tended to take the contemporary position on sex-role issues more frequently than men have (e.g., Erskine, 1971; Peters, Terborg and Taynor, 1974; Spence, 1972; Seboda, Morris and Ward, 1974), though there are exceptions (e.g., Ferree, 1974; Schreiber, 1975).

the respondents described themselves was strikingly different from the way they were described by others. Just why this discrepancy should exist for men and not for women is a question needing further research.⁸

6. Respondents more often attributed the contemporary position to themselves and their close friends (range: 94% to 54%) than they did to their mothers and fathers (range: 56% to 30%). This perceived difference in sex-role attitude between younger and older generations is consistent with what has been reported in some previous research⁹ and suggests the existence of what has been called a "generation gap."

7. Respondents more often attributed the contemporary position to themselves than they did to others of their own age and sex. For example, 66% of the men chose the contemporary position themselves; but only 55% attributed it to their closest friend of the same sex, and only 31% attributed it to the majority of men in the Army. Similarly, 90% of the women chose the contemporary position themselves; but only 83% attributed this position to their closest friend of the same sex, and only 84% attributed it to the majority of women in the Army. This pattern, showing large numbers of individuals claiming they have more of a particular characteristic than other people (even other people like themselves), is often interpreted as evidence that the characteristic in question is socially valued in the population being surveyed.¹⁰ If this is indeed the case, and if being contemporary in sex-role attitudes is indeed socially valued by Army personnel (such that they want to make sure they are considered at least as contemporary on this issue as other people are), then we would expect to find more and more people changing their attitudes in the future to bring them in line with this value--i.e., on this issue becoming more and more contemporary.

⁸ One possibility is that these men were exhibiting what has been called "pluralistic ignorance"--a situation in which members of a group privately hold nontraditional views on something but (perhaps because no one wants his own heresy to be discovered) don't make their actual views known to the others in the group. Thus, everyone (wrongly) thinks he is the only member of the group who is nontraditional on the matter in question. A second possibility is that, in describing themselves, the men were responding in terms of their values (i.e., the idea of what they thought was right) rather than in terms of their actual attitudes. This point is considered further in observation #7.

⁹ For example, in one study a sex-role attitude scale was completed by a sample of college students and also by the student's parents. On nearly every item the student responses were more contemporary than were the parent responses (Spence, J. T., and Helmreich, R. The attitudes toward women scale. Abstracted in the JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 1972, 2, 66).

¹⁰ Brown, R. Social psychology. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1965, p. 698ff.

Before concluding, we should point out something that may be obvious--viz., that the attitudinal patterns we have been discussing are based on responses to statements worded in a particular way. And while the observed patterns are entirely reasonable and do not contradict the bulk of previous research on this topic, it is certainly possible that wording the two statements differently would produce patterns different from those reported here. In particular, the fact that respondents were asked to make a forced choice between two fairly extreme positions may help explain why many who chose the contemporary position did not give egalitarian responses to all of the other questions. Respondents who followed instructions and chose the alternative with which they agreed most did not necessarily agree totally with everything the item said.

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